

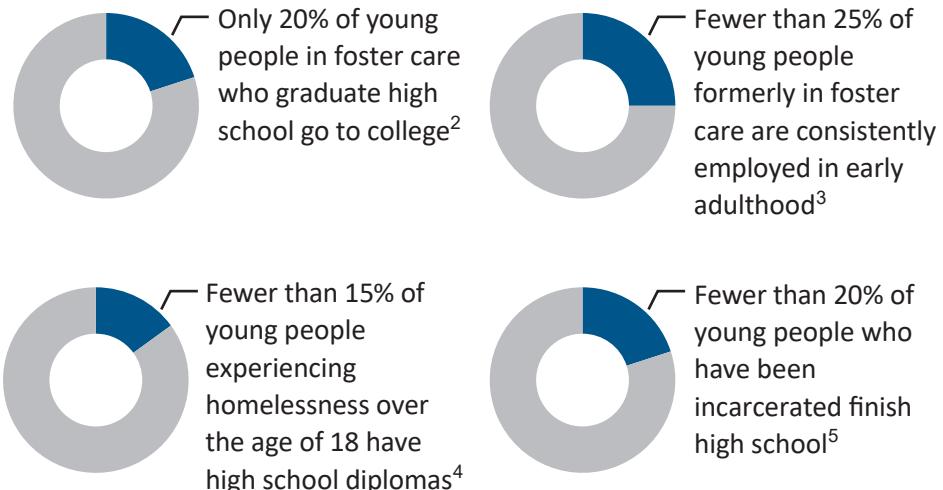
Lessons from the Implementation of Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential

LEAP

In 2015, the Annie E. Casey Foundation partnered with the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund to launch Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP), a multimillion-dollar initiative to increase employment and educational opportunities for young people ages 15-25 who have been involved in the child welfare and justice systems, or who are homeless. The initiative offers a unique opportunity to address the specific needs and challenges of these young people, including trauma they may have experienced in their lives, and get them on pathways to school and work. MDRC is conducting an evaluation of the initiative's implementation, outcomes, and costs.

4.6 million young people in the United States are not in school or working.¹

Young people who have a history of involvement in the foster care or justice systems, or who are experiencing homelessness, are disproportionately represented in this group.



How LEAP Supports Young People

Educational credentials and early work experience predict future employment and future income, and lack of success in these areas at an early age can have lifelong consequences.⁶ LEAP connects young people with education, skills, and experiences to help them realize their full potential. LEAP's design is informed by past research about what works to promote young people's success.⁷ Important aspects of the model include:

Connections to **supportive adults** who can provide help with the transition to adulthood typically provided by parents

Opportunities to develop **academic skills** to progress in school

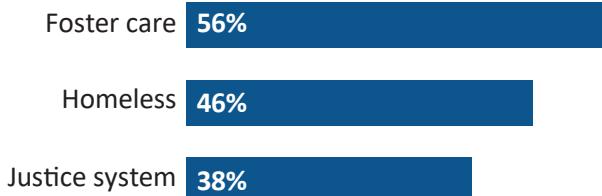
Help learning **job-readiness skills** they can use to get jobs and keep them

Help connecting with **resources in their communities** to address their health, housing, child care or other needs

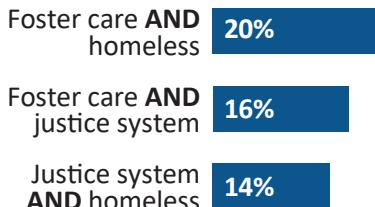
Continuity of services so they can keep getting support after they start school or work

About LEAP Participants

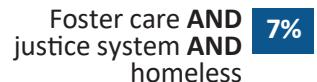
LEAP participants have past or current experience in the foster care or justice system or with homelessness.



28 percent have experience in two systems...

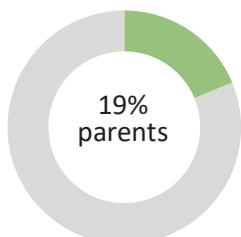
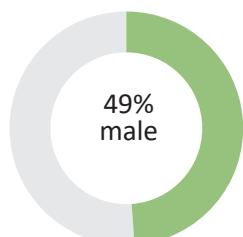
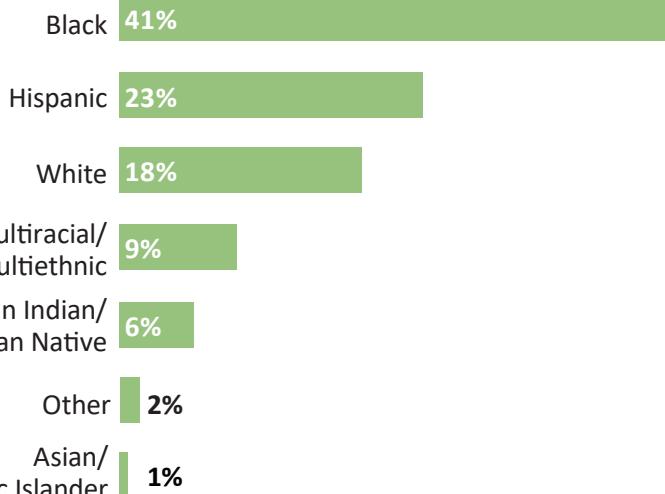
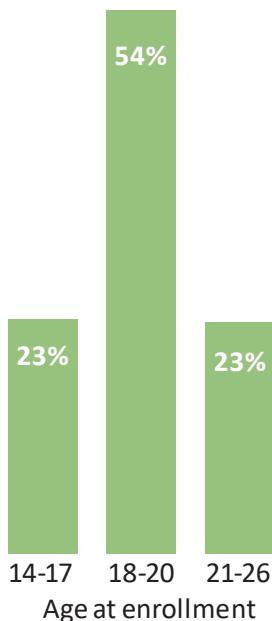


...and another 7 percent have experience in all three.



59% were in foster care, in the justice system, or homeless at **the time of enrollment**.

More about the backgrounds of LEAP participants



Two LEAP program models serve populations with different needs.

Back on Track (BoT)

74%

Has a high school diploma or equivalent

72%

Has been employed

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)

2%

28%

NOTE: Individual-level demographics were provided by LEAP programs on 1,349 participants who enrolled from April 2016 to December 2017.

About the LEAP Program Models

TWO ESTABLISHED
NATIONAL PROGRAMS
SERVING
DISADVANTAGED
YOUNG PEOPLE

1 Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG)

Targets young people who have not yet completed high school

ADAPTED TO A SPECIAL POPULATION: YOUNG PEOPLE AGES 15-25 WITH INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM, JUVENILE OR CRIMINAL JUSTICE, OR HOMELESSNESS

Programs' Core Components



LEAP Enhancements



JAG

- Curriculum on career and personal development, basic skills, and job skills
- Simultaneous enrollment in high schools or high school equivalency programs
- Personalized goal setting and support from a JAG specialist
- Connections to employers and job placements
- Student-led career association
- 12 months of follow-up support services

2 JFF's Back on Track (BoT)

Targets young people making the transition to college or postsecondary training

BoT

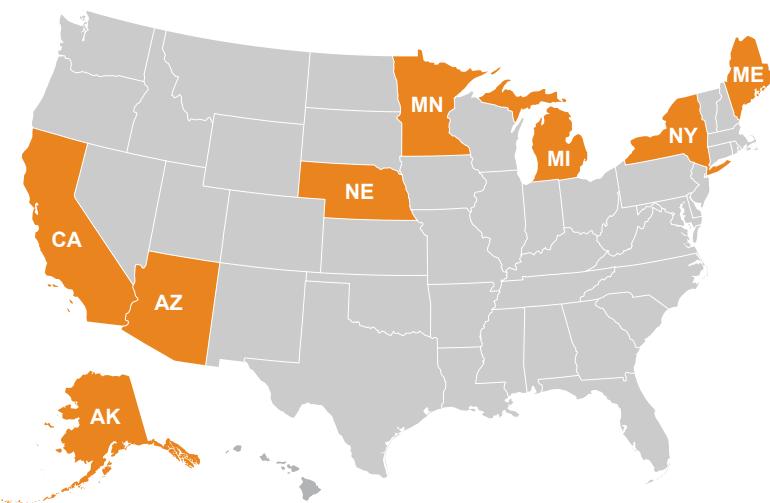
- Bridging curriculum and experiences to build college and career success skills
- Academic skill development to prepare for postsecondary study
- Personalized guidance and exploration of college and career training programs
- Help navigating enrollment and financial aid
- Connection to postsecondary resources, student organizations, and activities
- Continued support during the first year of college

- Staff members trained to work with young people who have experienced trauma
- Case management to connect participants to supportive services to meet their housing, child care, and basic needs
- Opportunities for participants to develop leadership skills and take on leadership roles in the program
- Cross-system partnerships to harness local resources and address gaps in services

"Especially for people coming out of foster home — I didn't know how to even go about going to college. My family didn't go to college, so having this resource to figure out what to do with my life, I definitely appreciate it."

—LEAP BoT Participant

LEAP is implemented by 10 local partnerships in 8 states.



The LEAP Evaluation

MDRC'S EVALUATION OF LEAP WILL PROVIDE

INFORMATION

Valuable information for practitioners and policy-makers seeking to improve academic and employment outcomes for these young people

LESSONS

Lessons about expanding established interventions and adapting them to new populations

STRATEGIES

Strategies to promote young people's engagement in services

COSTS

Information on the costs of providing LEAP services

MDRC'S EVALUATION AND EARLY FINDINGS

MDRC's evaluation will include a thorough look at the two models' implementation and adaptation, an examination of the role of local systems in LEAP implementation and LEAP enhancements, an analysis of individual-level participation and outcome data, and in-depth interviews with participants. A final report will be released in 2019.

MDRC conducted a round of site visits to each program in 2017 to learn about implementation. Though each LEAP location has structured its local program differently, there were common ways that each is adapting the two LEAP models to promote and sustain the engagement of participants. Examples from selected sites highlight how these adaptations work in practice.

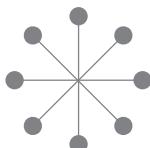


Tailoring service delivery to individuals

LEAP services are tailored to meet young people's needs and promote their engagement in the program.

LEAP programs also try to reengage and offer support to participants who have stopped active involvement in the program, recognizing that young people's employment and school trajectories are not always linear.

Some programs provide one-on-one opportunities for participants to learn the curriculum if their work or child care schedules make regular attendance in classes difficult.



Cross-sector connections to supportive services

LEAP programs help participants succeed by connecting them to needed support, often through cross-sector partnerships that harness local resources. Some programs partner with another organization or school to provide LEAP services alongside other critical forms of support, like housing or child care. At the system level, some programs are working across sectors to streamline data sharing, improve access to existing resources, and address service gaps.

NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OMAHA AND LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Back on Track was originally designed to be delivered to groups of young people who joined at the same time, but like many LEAP programs, Nebraska Children and Families has found that offering a combination of group-based and one-on-one forms of support can promote engagement in program activities. At one of the colleges where LEAP students are enrolled, the LEAP specialist meets one-on-one with each participant once a week to provide individual support, but also brings together the LEAP students as a group once a month to provide information and resources. This meeting allows LEAP participants to build community.

MINNESOTA

PROJECT FOR PRIDE IN LIVING (PPL) MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

PPL's LEAP program has layered partnerships with agencies and organizations to provide a robust set of services to LEAP participants. LEAP students, who attend JAG classes at alternative schools and earn credit toward their high school diplomas at the same time, also receive dedicated, personalized support from an on-site case manager who builds relationships with the young people and connects them to additional help they may need. PPL also has partnerships that provide opportunities for LEAP participants to enroll in community college, attend housing and financial literacy classes, and get work experience through internships.

NOTES

1. Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council, "Disconnected Youth" (website: www.measureofamerica.org/disconnected-youth, 2018).
2. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, "Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care," *Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care* January 2014 (website: <http://cdn.fc2success.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/National-Fact-Sheet-on-the-Educational-Outcomes-of-Children-in-Foster-Care-Jan-2014.pdf>, 2014).
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Coming of Age: Employment Outcomes for Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care Through Their Middle Twenties* (website: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/75376/report.pdf>, 2008.)
4. D. Wayne Osgood, E. Michael Foster, and Mark E. Courtney, "Vulnerable Populations and the Transition to Adulthood" (*The Future of Children* 20, 1: 209-229, 2010).
5. Laura S. Abrams and Todd M. Franke, "Postsecondary Educational Engagement Among Formerly-Incarcerated Transition-Age Young Men" (*Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 52, 4: 233-253, 2013).
6. Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, and Joseph McLaughlin, with Sheila Palma, "The Consequences of Dropping out of High School: Joblessness and Jailing for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Taxpayers" (Boston: Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, 2009).
7. Louisa Treskon, *What Works for Disconnected Young People: A Scan of the Evidence* (New York: MDRC, 2016); David Fein and Jill Hamadyk, *Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program*, OPRE Report #2018-65 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018); Cynthia Miller, Megan Millenky, Lisa Schwartz, Lisbeth Goble, and Jillian Stein, *Building a Future: Interim Impact Findings from the YouthBuild Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, 2016); Megan Millenky, Dan Bloom, Sara Muller-Ravett, and Joseph Broadus, *Staying on Course: Three-Year Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, 2011).

The LEAP evaluation is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, visit www.mdrc.org/project/learn-and-earn-achieve-potential-leap.